

294 *The Gros Ventres of Montana: Part II, Religion*

787 looking more closely Keg saw that the fellow was he, Keg, himself.
 778 The fellow said: "Do as you see me doing here. Use my throat
 as an object (button) to hide." Then Keg woke up and saw nearby
 a covey of prairie chickens at their mating dance. Keg was so
 given gambling power by the prairie chicken(s), and was a very
 successful gambler, from that time on."¹²

778 Acquisition of power directly and in first instance from a power-
 giving being gave the acquirer right of exclusive ownership and
 ● 424 use of the power. The power was a gift from the being to the
 425 human individual, and became the latter's property to be ex-
 clusively held and used by him, as would any gift given him out-
 right by a fellow Gros Ventre. The owner could however transfer
 it, in most cases, by sale or gift. The Boy and Thick explained
 the main features of the system as follows: "The individual who
 acquired the power, and he alone, would use it. He would not part
 with it unless someone bought it from him. . . . In case of pur-
 chase he would teach the buyer the secret of how to use the
 power. Then too the owner of the power might transfer it without
 remuneration to one of his children if the owner lived to old age
 and had [living] children; he might do this rather than have the
 secret of the power die with him and do no one any good." On
 other occasions The Boy, speaking particularly of doctoring power,
 further explained: "While a doctor had many power songs, no
 other doctor had a right to sing these songs, unless the doctor-
 owner transferred his power to the other. . . . If someone else
 knew what plant a given doctor used and tried himself to use it,
 he could not get results, because he would not know the songs
 and rites to use with it. . . . Even though he should know the songs
 and rites as well as the plants, it would have been very wrong to
 try to use them. . . . Only the one who had [acquired] the power
 had the right to practice it. If everybody had been free to practice
 it, there would have been no use for the doctor to have gone
 through such hardship [fasting, etc.] to acquire it."

Power acquired in first instance as a gift from a power-bestowing
 being, although exclusively owned by the recipient, could be under

¹² For further details, see Flannery and Cooper, 1946, pp. 407-08.

Supernatural Powers

295

certain conditions, to be described as we go along, transferred by gift or sale, loaned, or delegated. 778

Individuals who had personal ancestral helpers practiced no kind of transfer, loan or delegation. After all, such helpers were in no sense "owned" by or the property of these individuals. The concept of the ancestral helper is fundamentally different from that of power in this as in most other respects. 424 425

While we obtained records of many instances of transfer, by sale or gift, of war, doctor, and love power, we obtained none of transfer of gambling power. Whether it was transferable at all is a point we could not fully clear up; more probably it was not, but at any rate actual transfer either did not occur or must have been excessively rare. According to The Boy: "Nobody wanted their [gamblers'] power. It became so that it was non-transferable. . . . There were some [possessors of power], and among these was the gambler, who would not transfer."

A transferee could not, so far as we could discover, retransfer power by sale or gift to a third party, except perhaps power to be lucky, especially invulnerable, in warfare. Our field data on this point are slim.

While women sometimes, as we have seen, got power direct from power-giving beings, very commonly,—“mostly” The Boy stated,—the powers they possessed were acquired by transfer from men, or from women.

Initiative in transfer could be taken either by the owner of a given power or by the party wishing to purchase it.

When power was transferred either by sale or by gift, the transferrer carefully taught the transferee all the songs, rites, objects and taboos that pertained to the power in question.

So much for transfer in general. We now turn to certain aspects, first of transfer by sale, and after that of transfer by gift.

Transfer by sale of doctoring power, at least of major doctoring power, was, according to The Boy and Thick, uncommon; that of love power, rather common.

A man who had by quest acquired doctoring power could transfer it by sale to a maximum of four people. After the fourth transfer, he, according to The Boy, “would have exhausted it so far as he 778 425

SHAKING TENT AMONG ALGONQUIANS

63

Other songs, distinct from this summoning or shaking tent rite song, were also given and taught at times by ghost helpers. Two of them, both victory songs, were recorded as sung by The Boy in 1940. These two were given on occasions other than that on which the surviving relative initially acquired his ghost helper. 776
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[533]

After all the above teaching was concluded, the ghost of the deceased relative belonged to the survivor and was supposed to come whenever summoned by the latter in the manner the ghost told him while in trance to do. A great many Gros Ventre men and women had guardian spirits and "power" acquired by fasting and crying or otherwise. But fewer individuals, men and women, had ghost helpers. My informants in 1939 and 1940 could recall only four persons in the last two generations or last 70 years or so who had had ghost helpers.

In one case (see first of the two appended stories by Thick) two spirits tried to come to the shaking tent rite conducted by Woman, one bad and the other good, but whether the bad one was one of her deceased relatives or not, she never knew. The people were under the impression that the bad one was an intruder who used to come first and try to "horn in" on the proceedings. No case of a given person clearly having more than one ghost helper was recalled by my informants.

Ordinary "power" could be and often was transferred by the possessor to another person by donation or bequeathment. But a ghost helper never was so transferred and could not be. [424] ●

It may be added that neither my informants, The Boy and Thick, nor my interpreter, Thomas Main, all highly intelligent and informed men, were at all sure of the etymology of the word *tsatsawâ*². The Boy thought it might connote the meaning of "slave," "some one who is forced to do things." Thomas Main suggested a possible relationship to *tsatsa*—"coming, flight"; plus—*wa*, an old Gros Ventre word, meaning unknown. The two words for ordinary ghosts as such are *tsa-k'*² (sing.; pl., *tsa-k'an*:*a's* as *u* in English but), and *bi'te'*² (sing.; pl., *bi'eten*). *Tsatsawâ*² is used exclusively for ghost helpers, not for an ordinary ghost, or ghosts in general. An ordinary medicine man was called *nata'nhehi* (*a's* as *u* in but), but there was no special name 791
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